

This is an interview with Mr. Alfred Simper, of 3874 South 1500 East, Vernal, Utah, on this first day of November 1977. This is Diedra Northern of the Golden Age Center, Vernal, Utah.

Diedra Northern (DN): You were in the lumber business for about ten or eleven years?

Alfred Simper: Yes.

DN: Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?

Alfred: Well, what part do you want to know? From the start to the finish?

DN: From the start to the finish.

Alfred: Well, we started, we cut timber on the mountain. Had a mill up there and part-time here to home and I run the yard here. Sold the lumber here. And then after we'd been in business for a few years, they got some planers, and I planed the lumber and finished it up for house work, made all kinds of finished lumber for buildings, like 4-inch sizing and molding, all that stuff. Yes, I run the mill here and part-time and then had the lumberyard, too.

DN: Where did you get most of your trees from?

Alfred: On the mountain, back on the mountain, different places up there, different mountains, Brush Creek Mountain, Taylor Mountain.

DN: How did you bring the logs down?

Alfred: On trucks.

DN: On trucks?

Alfred: That's about the outline of it.

DN: You were in construction business, too?

Alfred: Well, no. I built four or five houses myself, but for my own, I didn't do no work for other people or anything.

DN: How long have you lived here in Vernal?

Alfred: See, sixty, sixty-five years.

DN: Quite a while. Can you tell me what it was like, from when you remember it as a boy?

Alfred: Well, I wasn't a boy here. I was raised in Salt Lake.

DN: Oh, in Salt Lake?

Alfred: Yeah, I never came here 'til '22, '23, when I came here.

DN: What was it like when you came here in '23?

Alfred: Well, it was settled up pretty much, all over the valley. But, of course, only partially to what it is now. We didn't have the streets or the buildings like they have now, that is, paved roads, you know, hard traveled roads. They was more primitive states, mostly farming, and stock raising about the business of the country then.

DN: Did you farm, too?

Alfred: Yes, yeah, I had 140 acre farm. Seven children.

DN: And you were an LDS bishop for how long?

Alfred: Twenty-seven years.

DN: What was that like?

Alfred: Well, it was a lot different then than what it is now. 'Course everything's on a cash basis now, you know. Guess you are a [LDS Church] member, are ya?

DN: Yes.

Alfred: So you understand that part of it. But when I was bishop, up 'til the last few years, it was all produce, hay and grain principally was our tithing, oh, seventy-five percent of it anyway, and fast offerings was the same, was flour, fruit, butter, and eggs, like that, very little cash. So it was quite different in that line.

DN: What were some of the other duties of a bishop?

Alfred: Well, just about the same as they are now, just run the affairs of the ward, organizations, to see they was organized and working smoothly. Just about the same as that. But then I was let out of bishop about three years and then I went into superintendent of Sunday school, superintendent for twenty-nine years.

DN: Oh, you stayed pretty active then, didn't you?

Alfred: Yeah, it kept me busy. Since then I've been home teacher and teach the priesthood classes. Still doing that.

DN: What did you have to do with the mail?

Alfred: Well, I was substitute mail carrier for a few years was all. I'd just take it when he wanted off or something that way; that was all I did with that. Anything else you'd like to think of, you'd like to mention?

DN: Oh, maybe you could tell me a little bit more about the lumber.

Alfred: Well, it's quite an experience handling, getting into the public, I found that out, met all kinds of 'em.

DN: How do you mean?

Alfred: Well, some of 'em was very particular, just wanted to sort the pile out and just pick out the best and others just come and take it. It was quite an experience for a me to run the mill and planer, too. Had two planers.

DN: How many men did you have to hire?

Alfred: I hired about two most, that is, here to home. 'Course I had more out on the mountain cutting timber and hauling, but I contracted that part of it. My boys done that and I just run it after they brought it here. When the mill was on the mountain, they run the mill there themselves and just hauled the lumber here and I just handled it. We delivered quite a lot of the lumber around the valley here.

DN: Did you deliver to businesses or just people?

Alfred: Well, mostly just people, individuals wanted to build or wanted a little lumber. If they wanted enough for a load, we'd deliver it, other than that, they was to come and get it.

The mill caught fire one time. One of my neighbors come and told me, it was about four in the morning, told me the mill was on fire. We got it out before it done too much damage.

DN: Did they have a fire department then?

Alfred: Well, we couldn't get it out here, no. They had a fire department in town, but it didn't come out in the country. We had water right close to the mill there and we got it out before it got too much damage.

Your fellers, different kind of men, you could get to work for ya. Some could be so handy and others just so awkward. It's quite an experience there. I don't know anything special about it, would be interesting. Nearly all serious, just work, that's about all, there wasn't much change, small business you know. Just two or three of us. It's quite interesting the different kinds of lumber we could make with the planers. We had nearly all kinds of finished lumber, you know, to build the houses and finish 'em. I did flooring and sizing and window and door casing and mop boards and such as that.

DN: What's the difference?

Alfred: Well, it's just like, now here, like this quarter around the edge of the floor there, you see. We make that kind of stuff, see it goes around the windows to fit the windows against and the doors to shut against. We had all kinds of bits, pret' near any kind of piece of lumber they wanted or stick. After we got the planer, we dried our lumber and planed it. Then I started to building some houses uptown, we was gonna move to town, build me a house up there. I thought we were gonna move up there. [By] the time I got it built, we didn't wanna move, so we kept a goin', finally we built five houses there and never moved in any of 'em.

DN: Where was this?

Alfred: In Vernal.

DN: Where did you build the five houses?

Alfred: There was two right on the corner of Wasatch and Vernal Avenue and then there was another one, well, just west of that old corner store was on Fifth West and First South, right across the road from the First Ward chapel, built one there. Then there's one on, let's see, that one's on Third West and Fourth South, in there by Freddie Phelps. Maybe you know where he lives, I built one there. Then there's one on Second North. Built one duplex with the idea that whenever one of us was gone, why, the other one moved in the other part of the duplex, but we've never done that. So we've lived right here ever since we came to Vernal.

DN: Did you go right into the lumber business when yo came here?

Alfred: No, oh, no. Just farming for a long time.

DN: Farming?

Alfred: Yeah, lumber business along last years, no, we just farmed and worked around different jobs. For quite a few years, we'd farm all summer and then we bought a hay baler and run hay baler during wintertime, a lot of the time. Baled hay for the people around wanted hay baled. Quite different when we first came here. There was no electricity, no telephone or anything like that out here in the country. They had it in Vernal, but we didn't have it out this way for several years. No water systems or anything that way.

DN: Quite an inconvenience, wasn't it?

Alfred: Oh it was. I don't know how we'd make it now. 'Course the streams, the ditches, all freeze up. We just had thaw ice in the winter, melt it for water, or haul water and it would freeze up. So, we found ice was the best way and then just melt it as we go along, you know. Yeah, things is lots more convenient now. I don't know what we'd do if we had to go back to the old ways again. Freightin, I did a little freightin from Watson to Vernal, team and wagon.

DN: What did you freight?

Alfred: Oh, we'd haul wool or hay or grain to Watson and then we'd bring stuff for the merchants here and haul back freight. There was no automobile them days.

DN: How much did freighting pay?

Alfred: Well it was hardly anything compared to wages now. I run four horses and two wagons. I think it was about \$10 a day.

DN: And you had to feed your horses out of that?

Alfred: Yeah, keep the outfits up. Takes about a week to make a trip.

DN: How many miles was it?

Alfred: Oh, it was fifty or sixty. I'd just do that in the spring or fall, just odd jobs, farming was my main work. Had 140 acres, was all farm ground.

DN: Did you have any sheep or cattle?

Alfred: No, just what we needed to home here. Raised our beef, and milk and butter and stuff, pigs and chickens. But I never did cattle business or sheep. But I sold it all now, just a home here and one acre of ground, sold my houses up town. So, just sitting here passing time away now. Been alone here now seven years, a little over.

Building here in front of this one, just the walls, there's no roof or anything on it, but we fixed it up and lived in it for several years and then we built this one, we've had this home ever since. Took us nine days to come from Salt Lake to here.

DN: Nine days. Did you come by horse and wagon?

Alfred: Team and wagon, yeah. We just loaded everything we had in two wagons and came out here to stay.

DN: What made you decide to come out here?

Alfred: Well, we had a chance to get a farm here and that's what we wanted. We had never seen it, though. We just picked up and came out here.

DN: You hadn't ever seen it?

Alfred: No. No neither one of us had been this side of Park City, didn't know a person in the valley. We had heard of one man that used to live in there that lives here close, but we didn't know a person, never seen one from here.

DN: Were people hard to get to know?

Alfred: No, very friendly, awful good neighbors here. That's why, maybe, we've stayed here all the time, I guess. Come time to move the town, we didn't want to leave the people here. They've made lots of changes in that way. The country's built up so and everything, church has built up and separated and divided. When we first came here, it was all Naples Ward, from here out this end and several years. Then when the wards divided, I was put in bishop, I was the first bishop here.

DN: Oh, of Naples Second Ward or was it when they were divided?

Alfred: Well, we just called it Davis Ward. We had branch Sunday school out here before that, before it was divided. A schoolteacher here was George A. Davis and he was superintendent of the first Sunday school here, so that's where the Davis Ward got its name, from George A. Davis. It was called the Davis Sunday school, cause he was the superintendent of it. So when the wards divided us, just naturally said, called [it] Davis Ward.

Now we have Davis First and Davis Second. When the first wards divided, we didn't have no building her. We had a schoolhouse here where our chapel now stands; we had all our meetings in the schoolhouse for several years. Then we built a building across the road where the old chapel is, held our meetings in that for I don't know how many years and then we built that old chapel while I was bishop, just had that built two or three years when I was released. So that's about the history in the nutshell.

Some people from Salt Lake, television outfit, came out and had me on television a few minutes. Yeah, they came out with the big lights, came right here. Just short, it was.

DN: What was it about?

Alfred: Well, they just asked me a few questions about like you have here. Then they had some of the high school kids here, they're writing their school book, they took down notes, they'll write up a little history of that.